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Toward a Cinema of Ideas

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Toward a Cinema of Ideas
John Reilly and I have been experimenting with documentary programs about ideas for the past 10 years through our nonprofit media center, Global Village. Documentaries are traditionally seen either as a form for the expression of news and information or as an instrument for the objective recording of reality. We see them as a means of visualizing complex ideas.

Numerous filmmakers encompassing both the narrative and the documentary traditions have experimented with what Jay Ruby, in a personal communication, has labeled the "cinema of ideas." These filmmakers, including Eisenstein, Vertov, Godard, Rohmer, and Rouch, have sought to present their ideas through behavior and dialogue which can be filmed and which both explicitly and implicitly express their ideas. We have been influenced by their techniques and have modified them, adding the device of juxtaposing individuals and events that are not directly related conceptually. Thus, in Home, one of our recent documentaries, we used portraits of four families at crisis moments in their lives to explore the way in which the meaning of home and family has changed in America over the last 200 years.

In the history and development of documentary film and video a number of schools have emerged, including the British documentary tradition which most American documentary "white papers" for the networks are based on. But two other major forms, loosely called cinéma vérité, have also developed. Although people do not frequently differentiate between the two forms, they have distinct goals and methods. Eric Barnouw, in Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film, has offered a useful distinction.

**Cinéma vérité** is a style principally associated with the French filmmakers Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. At the time of their film Chronicle of a Summer, they were asked what they were doing. They said they were trying to continue Kino Pravda, Vertov's school of filmmaking, a cinema of provocation, which was literally translated into French as cinéma vérité. Later, people writing in English interpreted this to mean "cinema of truth."

Rouch's approach involved using the camera as a provocative tool to elicit responses from the subject being filmed. In Chronicle Rouch went into the streets of Paris with a camera asking people, "Are you happy?" and he filmed their reactions. The filmmaker consciously created the scene. It is said by filmmakers that when asked about his objectives, Rouch says his goal is to get people to reveal themselves in a way they never have before.

The second major style, which Barnouw calls "American direct cinema," was pioneered by Drou, Leacock, and Pennebaker. Robert Drew was trying to translate into filmmaking a journalistic essay style of photography that he had learned at Life magazine. He collaborated with Leacock and Pennebaker to create an observational, descriptive style. Their objective was to record the activities of selected individuals in a way that allowed them to be themselves. They generally recorded public figures or people associated with a controversial institution or issue in a way that magnified values and social trends of interest to the general public.

At Global Village we have developed a third style, which we have loosely been calling "modified cinéma vérité" and which combines elements of both cinéma vérité and American direct cinema. Our method, like the two just described, is process-oriented; we do not use scripts. We first develop a framework, or blueprint, for expressing our theme through the observation of crises and change in real subjects' lives. This technique allows us to record visible evidence of the way in which social or economic factors act on peoples' ideas and values. Interviews with our subjects, based on the theoretical framework of the project, are juxtaposed with the observational material. The structure of the work usually follows the natural flow of events in our subjects' lives paralleled with the logical presentation of our theme derived from the interviews.
History of Global Village

These methods have roots in early Global Village productions. Global Village was founded 10 years ago by John Reilly and Rudi Stern as a place to screen works made on video tape, a new material for producing television images by using portable and inexpensive equipment. Together with video artists such as Nam June Paik and Frank Gillette, Reilly and Stern produced works which were shown at Global Village.

In 1969 Global Village was one of the only theaters in America where this kind of video could be seen. In the early years Stern and Reilly produced both video art and documentaries. In 1972 Stern's departure from Global Village and my arrival coincided with a greater emphasis on documentary production.

In Lifestyles: An Experiment in Feedback (1972) John Reilly and a group of students compared attitudes about sex roles by focusing on the lives of two members of their classes who had radically different experiences and views about their roles. In Politics of Intimacy (1973) I explored changing attitudes about sexuality by juxtaposing 10 women talking about their own feelings and experiences. These two works both drew heavily on verbal articulation of the program theme, but they contained within them the seeds of a method for the visualization of abstract ideas. In Giving Birth (1976) we taped the births of children to four couples who chose radically different methods of giving birth. We planned to include interviews with single mothers, mothers who had been administered various types of questionably drug during labor, and numerous experts. But as we proceeded with the work, we realized that the most powerful material was contained in the juxtaposition of the four births. We lightly wove a few experts through this structure, but largely relied on the births to convey our concern with parental choice and responsibility in giving birth.

Huming (1979) was the first work in which we consciously sought to evoke an abstraction through the observation of change or crises in real subject's lives. John and I had been struggling to figure out a way to explore changes in the concept and functions of family life. One of the physicians in Giving Birth had commented on the importance of institutions which were involved with families in caring about important life moments. He spoke of the birth of a child, a marriage, the death of a parent, and ultimately one's own death as especially crucial experiences. His phrase resonated with us, and we decided rather blindly to juxtapose sequences of those moments in several families' lives and to use those contemporary moments as a means of evoking past methods of handling these life events. The result was very powerful, not simply from an emotional point of view, but also from a symbolic one. The framework that we created was enormously suggestive of the shifts and changes in family life that we wanted to portray.

Our current project, a series called The Pursuit of Happiness in American Life, also has rather abstract origins. We were first struck by the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" when Walter Mondale used it in his eulogy to Hubert Humphrey in 1978. Although Mondale spoke of "the pursuit of happiness" in reverent tones, the phrase sounded jarring to us: in the context of Hubert Humphrey's funeral and a decade in which increasing numbers of Americans were feeling apprehensive about the future, the optimism of the phrase seemed out of place. This experience disconcerted us and stimulated us to think about the origins and values implicit in the phrase. We decided to do a series that would explore this concept in the lives of five contemporary American families and that would also probe backward through history to suggest where contemporary ideas about the right to pursue happiness came from.

As we began working with this idea we realized that it was enormously complex, involving both philosophical and historical concepts. We decided to apply to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant so that we could undertake a large-scale series and afford to involve scholars in the project.

In January 1980 we applied for and received a planning grant from NEH, and we formed a group of consulting scholars that included a former collaborator, John Demos (social historian), Jay Ruby (visual anthropologist), David Noble (cultural historian), Muricel Diman (cultural anthropologist), and Laurence Thomas (philosopher). We asked this group to help us research the idea of the pursuit of happiness in American history and devise a framework for uncovering evidence of its importance in the lives of contemporary American subjects. Later, when we began to specify the types of individuals and families we wanted to use for the project, we sought out three additional scholars in the area of Black, Native American, and Ethnic and Women's Studies. Jeanie Bains (Black Studies), Mike Mitchell (Native American specialist and filmmaker), and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (Ethnic and Women's Studies) joined our group.

Because our work is process-oriented, we felt we needed to create some method of working that would allow an authentic involvement of these scholars in the project. There is little precedent for the sustained involvement of scholars in television production. In fact, collaborations between filmmakers and scholars are notoriously rocky. We decided to develop a format for collaboration that would increase the involvement of the scholars beyond the script-and-proposal-writing stage but at the same time clarify and define production roles. We based our structure on the idea of an ensemble method of collaboration from theater,
in which various specialized people—actors, lighting designers, writers—work together to produce a work of art. In the theatrical model constant feedback and revisions within the group define the creative method. John and I felt that we could benefit from this long-term involvement of professional scholars as long as our leadership roles were clearly understood.

So far I think we've been very successful. Our former collaborator, John Demos, offered to work with us. We did extensive reading on the subject to expand the ideas into a proposal. After receiving a planning grant, we enlisted new scholars to help refine and reshape the ideas, revealing new layers of the concept. During a group meeting we built a model, using our refined understanding of the issues and concept. This model was once again presented to the scholars, who made suggestions for revisions of the framework. This consultation process with the scholars was repeated throughout the planning stage and will continue in the preproduction, production, and postproduction stages.

Simply stated, we decided to isolate the five key ideas we believe are intimately connected to American interpretations of the pursuit of happiness: "land," "freedom," "livelihood," "achievement," and "survival." Each of the programs of the series will focus on one of these themes. We will choose five families to provide figurative representations and evidence for the examination of the idea of the right to pursue happiness. Each program will include segments from all five families but will feature the family whose past and present experience most powerfully evokes the program theme.

The role of the scholars will be most important in the selection of families, in providing feedback on the process of shooting, and planning the editing of the material. The particular situation of a chosen family may vary from the hypothesized model, requiring the restructuring of the program's model. Unpredictable responses from the subjects will require reconsultation with the scholars and revision of the model to incorporate these new problems and ideas. The question for both ourselves and the scholars who wish to work with us in making ideas explicit in our work is: "How do you make something conceptual filmic?" We have found that the process of grappling with this question is enormously exciting for all of us.

**Collaborative Aspects of the Method**

Our method is principally based on raising questions with our subjects and looking with them to find answers in their lives. To achieve these goals, the interest and cooperation of our subject are absolutely necessary. The ideas behind the project are presented to the subject, and our methods of working and our objectives are described. This is sometimes reinforced by showing them previous work done by Global Village.

In our minds a subject is an active participant in the creative process of making the work. We place a high value on their contributions and go to some lengths to protect the relationship. At the outset of a project we try to be very clear about what the work will involve, what we expect from the families, and what we return to them. Because most of the people we work with are not public figures, we show our subjects the work before it is aired, in case there is material in the piece they object to. Nobody yet has asked for any changes, although in a few instances some one has been mildly disturbed by aspects of the program.

In many ways audiences are also collaborators. The audience is presented with both the framework of the program and the observational material from the lives of our subjects. From this material the audience creates its own intellectual experience, adding to it personal experiences and commonsense knowledge. Picasso described the process I am referring to when he said, "A picture is not something which is thought up ahead of time and done. It is a process, an image which is constantly changing. It even changes when it's finished depending on what the viewer is thinking or feeling."

The techniques we use to involve the audience fall roughly into two categories: empathetic devices and distancing devices. To create empathetic bonds between the subject and the viewer we have always used as subjects real people rather than actors. Like Drew, Pennebaker, Wiseman, and other filmmakers using American direct cinema and cinéma vérité, we spend as much time as possible with our subjects so that they will feel as comfortable as possible with us during the taping period. Although we recognize the influence of our presence, we never interfere in the natural flow of events by, for example, asking the subjects to do things over again for the camera.

We also solicit a powerful event or crisis to tape because at such a time the subject's behavior is clearly painted. Crises occur in everyone's life, and in the subject's response to a crisis, the values and beliefs which motivate people are stripped down and become believable to the viewer. This method of capturing what is essentially an abstraction is similar to the methods photographers use to catch the abstrac-
tion of choreography, stopping a dancer in motion. The clarity of action at a crisis moment in contrast to everyday details and textures is the essence of the work.

Finally, to create a powerful and attractive story, we use conventional dramatic techniques of filmmakers and playwrights to finally structure our program to draw our audience in. We structure our shooting around strong individuals and clear action. We also, in editing, use the classic methods of dramatic introduction, exposition of the problem, and dénouement.

Along with these efforts to draw people into our work, we employ techniques that distance viewers from the subject, causing them to reflect on the ideas presented in the work and, we hope, to search within themselves for answers. The devices we use are like those that the playwright Bertholt Brecht used on the stage, where they were known as "alienating" devices. Brecht believed that the audience in traditional theater believed too much in the reality of the characters and action. Because of their tendency to empathize, they never took a step back to consider the themes that the playwright was trying to convey when he wrote the piece. One of Brecht's devices was to make his characters break out of their roles and speak directly to the audience or burst into song. Another device was the use of title cards, which intentionally broke the dramatic flow of the scene and pointed to underlying political issues. A third was to deliberately reveal set machinery, lighting apparatus, and other elements of stagecraft hitherto concealed. Brecht's objective was to make the play move beyond the carefully reconstructed reality and become a provocative display which involved the audience in the resolution of problems and crises.

As producers we use alienating or reflexive devices as well. The first device we use occurs during the opening titles and credits. In addition to program titles we always put in the title "This work is by John Reilly and Julie Gustafson," so that the audience will know that the program is a work originating from two individuals, that it is authored. After the titles we generally dedicate the work, thereby revealing a part of our motivation for undertaking the project. For example, Giving Birth was dedicated to "our son—Lars Christopher Reilly—born 9/25/75." In just a few words we were able to suggest that the birth of our child had motivated Giving Birth.

The presence of a narrating voice or titles also reminds the viewer of our influence. Although we use only a small amount of narration to introduce the subjects and the objectives of the program, we use our own voices. Later, when we ask questions of our subjects, the audience can connect our voices to the narration and therefore to the point of view of the work.

A second distancing device is to include glimpses of the mechanics of the shooting process in the final work, a practice derived from the techniques of both cinema vérité and American direct cinema. We may tape ourselves setting up the lights and thereby see the effects of our presence on the subject's life. We also include shots of the microphones or other equipment so that the viewer occasionally sees the complete reality of the scene. Another device is to show the conceptual mechanics of making the program. We usually include, for example, the questions we ask people instead of just their responses. We have been encouraged by our group working on Pursuit of Happiness to include scenes from the first few times we spend with the subject when our presence is most noticeable to the subject, and to consider using a first-person narration, which would give a clearer idea of our underlying motives and intentions for making the work. For example, we might say outright in the narration how we got the idea and explain what our method is.

The importance of the collaboration among artist, scholar, subject, and audience is that we are able to identify and formalize important intellectual and social ideas which are part of everyday life and which surface by connecting them to a disciplined and intellectually accurate framework. The audience, inspired by the questions we raise and moved by our subjects' responses, asks questions of themselves and search for resolutions in their own lives. Our hope is that these factors combine to create not only a moving experience but also a profound intellectual one—a participation usually denied television viewers.

Production

John and I divide the labor. In addition to his creative responsibilities, John acts as executive producer and is responsible for fund-raising, financial matters, and distribution of the work. He conducts the primary interviews with the subjects as well. Being freed from day-to-day on-location shooting enables him to maintain a distance from the subjective interaction with the families and to keep an overview of the project. In addition to my creative role, I act as line producer, initiating the search for subjects and planning the production details in the preproduction period. I do all the camera work and later edit the material. My most difficult task is that on location I must respond to the families and make decisions regarding their needs while still keeping the idea in mind and the subjects within the framework of the piece.

The first step in production is the tentative selection of a family from those we have interviewed. As we discussed earlier, it is necessary to evaluate the spe-
cific characteristics of the family to see if they fit the model, and if not, if the model can be altered to incorporate variables slightly different from those originally hypothesized. In the preproduction period of Home, for example, we planned to record a subject facing his or her own death for the final sequence. We found, however, that in the family we picked the experience the family was going through was more suggestive of the "death of a parent" sequence than the one of "facing one’s own death," so we used it for that. Then we adapted our plans for the next sequence to account for this change.

We then ask a family to participate. If the family members decline, we may ask them to recommend another family, and the process begins again. If they accept, we must evaluate their reasons for accepting. An urge to be seen on television is not sufficient; the individual family members must have an inherent interest in the idea and energy in expressing their thoughts on it that will transfer well to the video medium.

Generally, the family’s initial reaction is tentative; they usually have a lot of questions and reservations about how the project will affect their lives. Before reaching a final decision, the families may discuss the project with all those who may be affected—family members and friends.

The reasons behind subjects’ decisions to participate are varied but generally fall into three main categories. They may be stimulated by the potential education experience; they may see it as an opportunity to learn about television and more about themselves. Or they may see the project as a means of rethinking an issue which the program is about or, in the case of The Pursuit of Happiness, of the importance of recovering their family history. Finally, a family may participate because of a sense of self-worth, and the realization that it has an important story to tell.

After receiving final confirmation from the family, we begin planning the production period with them. We explain the function and the purpose of the shooting periods, the first interview, the observational shooting, and the wrap-up interview. This is important so that families know that the shooting is not open-ended. We clarify their understanding that we will be working with them for approximately 3 months and arrange a shooting schedule. We usually try to shoot the observational material consistently, approximately 3 days a week over a 3-month period. We prefer to shoot from morning to night, although some families prefer a shorter block of time such as 4 to 11 P.M.

Another important point to be worked out with the families is the event or series of events that precipitated the crisis around which the sequence is structured. With Dee and Lee, the couple about to be married in Home, we chose specific events leading up to the marriage and the marriage itself. When all the details have been worked out and the contractual agreement is accepted, we enter into the first stage of shooting, the interview.

Prior to the first interview, we will meet with the scholars to discuss the specific questions that will be used in the interview and to review the conceptual model that will be the framework within which the interview is guided. The questions are designed to elicit information which creates the material to be used in the editing, material which expresses the contemporary setting and the historical background of the family. The first questions are of an expository nature that will eventually help us to introduce the family—who they are, what type of work they do, and the nature of the crisis. This is also the interview to bring in questions that will help us in the editing; to foreshadow and explain the values motivating the crisis moment. For example, for the birth sequence of Home, we asked Irene and Barry Berner, “Why are you having the baby away from the hospital?” Their answer provided some of the expository material we needed in the opening minutes of the birth sequence. It also explained the beliefs that motivated them to make such an unusual decision.

It is also necessary to elicit the subject’s responses to the principal question of the program or series. In Home the underlying concern was to explore the way in which important moments in human life have changed in the last 200 years. In our first interview with the expectant couple we discussed questions of different methods of delivery and why they had rejected a hospital setting for the birth of their second child. Their answer provided material to express our theme to the audience.

Another example of the way our questions generate material for the construction, this time historical contrasts, occurred in Home. We were interested in seeing how the life of Lena, the woman facing old age in a nursing home, was different from people in the generation after her. She had been married for 50 years and we asked her, “In light of all the couples getting divorced today, how did you stay married so long?” She gave an answer which evoked what she called “old-fashioned ideas” about marriage.

In Pursuit of Happiness we will ground the subject’s present situation in the historical events that shaped their forebears’ culture and adaptation in the United States. Questions will be used to elicit continuities of values between then and now to see how their value system has changed in relation to economic and social developments outside the family. In guiding the direction of the interview, we know it will be important to provoke the family to think abstractly about concrete events in their lives. We will try to get them to go beyond the personal crisis and think more abstractly about the motivation of their behavior.
Lena Gardiner, a 94-year-old widow (from the "Growing Old" segment of Home) with Home producer Julie Gustafson and her child.

John Reilly, Julie Gustafson, and Nathaniel Merrill, producers of Home.
The initial interview is usually the first time that the family has been recorded on video tape, and as such it is introductory, providing an opportunity to acquaint the subject with the technology we use. The immediate playback offered by video is taken advantage of at this time so the subjects can see themselves and become more comfortable with the shooting process.

As interviewers, we are aware of the need to ask questions which set off problems and foreshadow the crisis which will be resolved by the end of the program. We must also respond to the needs of the family, be concerned about issues that must be dealt with sensitively. We never try to trick a subject into revealing damaging information about him- or herself; in fact, we try to warn an individual if we feel there may be negative feedback to his or her situation, giving the subject the option to suggest the best approach. This concern is based on one of our underlying principles: our work is about the relation between a subject’s behavior and belief and intellectual themes; it is not about individual neurosis. We try very hard not to exploit subjects for sensationalism.

After the initial question-and-answer period we stop asking our prepared questions and allow the subjects to free-associate ideas that have been stimulated during the first half hour of the interview period. Once the initial questions have given us material to construct the framework, we find that subjects bring up a lot of rich textural material as they reconsider their family’s history and value system. During this latter period the subjects usually state new or related problems that they return to later in the shooting.
Once the first interview is completed and we (in the case of The Pursuit of Happiness, scholars, producers, and family) are confident that it will be a mutually beneficial relationship, the observational period of shooting begins. The idea behind this period is to capture an event or crisis in a subject's life. We record material using the natural flow of events within the family on a day-to-day basis and over a discrete period of time, and we use this to organize our portraits. The observational material provides interesting and provocative contrasts to the interview material; it becomes possible to see what a subject actually does in response to a given situation as opposed to what he or she says he or she will do in the interview.

We conduct the observational period as unobtrusively as possible. We do not use anything outside the natural scene, neither sets nor scripts. We try not to ask people to change their behavior, reproduce an action, or repeat a phrase. In the editing process we maintain the naturalness by not introducing music or other effects to the pace of the material. It remains as close to what we observe as possible.

During the observational shooting only the sound person and I are on location. On the first day of the shooting period we arrive with all our equipment and begin setting up the lights, which will remain in position during the entire shooting period. We experiment with different lighting conditions and make acoustical tests and adjustments, perhaps supplying a soft-spoken person with a wireless microphone. We may bring along the first taped interview to show the family. During this time the family becomes more comfortable with the shooting process.

As we mentioned above, the observational period operates on two axes. First, we shoot several days from morning to night. We find that subjects begin with a certain mood in the morning that influences the day's events. The resolution of daily problems usually occurs during the early evening hours, after dinner and before bedtime.

The second axis is to record specific events that relate to a crisis where resolution elicits thematic elements and demands an examination of values. In most of the sequences in Home, we chose a clearly defined event such as birth, death, or marriage. In one sequence about Lena aging in the nursing home, we focused on events relating to the arrival of her daughter from Florida. This provided us with a discrete time period in which to search for material for the final program.

On location I use my own discretion in the scenes I choose to tape, keeping in mind that they should relate to the program's theme. It is important to find an opening scene within the first third of the shooting period. If a scene which introduces the program's theme and the subject's concerns about it has not been found, it may be necessary to reevaluate the model and/or family and change one or both. Sometimes the opening scene comes easily, as in the case of Lena in Home. The very first day we went to work with her, she turned from making her bed and sighed, saying, "It's not easy to grow old."

In addition to the opening scene and expository material, I look for scenes to reveal the "cathartic" process of resolution of the sequence's crisis. At some point there must be a scene that addresses the subject's own resolutions and reflections and ends the sequence.

It sometimes proves difficult for me to maintain distance (objectivity) while shooting. I cannot avoid interaction with the subject and may respond subjectively to the event going on in the family. In this case John provides perspective on the direction of the project through his "objective" evaluation of the on-location events. In The Pursuit of Happiness the scholars, too, may be called in to elaborate on ideas that emerge during this interaction with the families and may assist in expanding or refining conceptual ideas behind the daily events.

When the observational period is completed, a final interview is conducted, with John as interviewer. The same questions that were asked in the first interview are repeated. For example, in the marriage segment of Home we ask, "After your marriage, what do you think of your decision to have a big family wedding in a church?"

Editing

The final stage of production is the editing procedure. Editing is the use of the raw footage as it is put together in a final program. The physical work of editing involves reviewing the footage, transferring the footage from cassette to cassette, weeding out the good takes from the bad, and putting one shot next to another.

But the editing process actually begins long before, when the program's intent is established, and continues throughout the creative process of production. The design of the program, the choice of scholars to work with, the choice of subjects, even the camera and the lighting employed during shooting reflect the ideas which are later refined in the editing process.

Editorial decisions are made throughout the shooting. During the shooting process it is kept in mind that there must be sufficient material, which will finally be pieced together in the editing process, to build the program's thematic framework. The choice of times to shoot is an intrusion on the flow of daily events and represents a decision as to whether a scene is important to the thematic development of the program. The choice of shots and the length of shots again are edi-
torial decisions. In the shooting process, the intentions of our investigation take on shape in the footage; editing creates a coherent and visible expression of these intentions for the television audience. Metaphors emerge which shape the design of the final program and suggest resolutions to the questions posed by the investigation.

In the selection of the shots which will be used in the piece, it is important that each shot add some element to the development of the idea of the program. It is useful to think of the raw material in literary terms. Each shot is combined with other shots to form a scene, much like words in a paragraph. A number of scenes put together create a sequence, similar to a chapter in a novel. Finally, all the sequences or chapters are put together and the whole work is complete.

When the footage has been copied, and the originals put aside until the final edit, we can begin to look for the work which is hidden in the raw material. We look at this footage from beginning to end with as few preconceptions as possible. We want to approach the material with an open mind, trying to see what is there rather than what we plan or hope to be there. At Global Village we employ an assistant editor who has not been on location, and together we look at the footage and take detailed notes, called "catalogues."

In the cataloguing notes we describe events and write down the dialogue verbatim. We also make technical comments (e.g., "terrible sound"), often indicating that something may be totally unusable on tape although the content may help us make other decisions or be useful in writing the narration. We also make filmic structural comments, for example, "possibly good opening scene."

During the cataloguing process, when we find particularly rich or significant shots, we call in John. He is seeing the footage for the first time. In effect, he's almost watching a rough edit because we only show him what we think is important. Together we discuss this footage for the best scenes. The scholars may be informally involved in cataloguing, to discuss whether an issue has been covered.

After cataloguing, John and I discuss how to build the program; then I make a paper edit. The paper edit represents our first attempt to design the program. This is analogous to writing a book, where you write a broad outline showing the large coherent parts. We then begin to fill in the details of the paper edit on a scene-by-scene basis, always with the entire program in mind. But, just as with a book outline, if it doesn't seem to flow well the edit won't work. So we must be constantly prepared to revise and rework the paper edit. When it is completed, the scholars are sent the paper edit for comments and suggestions.

With the edit down on paper, we try a real edit. This is a long process involving constant starts and stops as we search through the footage for the necessary shots. I begin editing with broad strokes, working down to the smaller shots. Often the structure changes right away. The language, meter, rhythm, and tone of the footage are very powerful factors influencing the content. If we find that the aesthetics of the footage say something other than what is down on the paper edit, we may revise the outline or even look for and shoot new footage.

I usually start editing with the first scene of the first program. This is often difficult and the end result unsatisfying, so I may go on to something easier rather than forcing the first scene. In Home we worked on the first sequence, the birth, for two weeks without satisfaction. Instead of forcing the edit, I moved on to the next sequence with Lena. The shots emerged one after another, building scenes until the entire sequence was completed 2 days later. Working with the Lena sequence revealed the aesthetic shape and tone of the whole work. We then edited the next two sequences; one was easy, the other tougher, but neither as difficult as the first. Then, once the shape of the portrait had revealed itself, we went back and reedited the first sequence.

Sometimes the problem with the first sequence is that it lacks some structural element. In the birth sequence a crucial set of questions were missing. To correct this we went back to the family and asked these questions in a final interview. This shows how our method can develop from our early shooting experiences. Although there may be false starts, once a path through the footage has been cleared the work falls into place.

Video editing is simply a transfer of shots from one tape cassette to another. With each transfer the image moves another generation away from the original. After numerous reeds, in which sequences or shots are moved around without starting again from the beginning, the image on the tape has been removed so many generations that it is now barely visible.

At the end of the rough edit we usually add the titles, which we believe should foreshadow the program content. Titles are shot over symbolic images from the program in a way that poses a question to the viewer. The titles are in the foreground, and a shot of the subject, muted under the titles, is in the background. Our conception of the title shot is that it constitutes a summation of the program, encapsulated in a single glimpse. Throughout the rest of the program, we bring out all the details which were in the background, elaborating on the location, the characters, the actions, and so on.

When we are satisfied with the rough edit, we begin the final edit by bringing the originals of the footage chosen for the final piece to a video-tape editor (for
our last few tapes we have worked with John Godfrey of TV Lab at WNET). We also bring extra footage to create leeway for dissolves at the beginning and on end of shot. I also bring in extra shots, not included in the rough edit, in case of last-minute revisions or refinements. This material is transferred to quad and time-coded. Time-coding involves "burning in" hours, minutes, seconds, and frames along the bottom of the picture. It provides great accuracy and flexibility in the final edit. The total amount of footage transferred and time-coded is usually about twice the length of the final program.

The final editing process has been revolutionized in the past 2 to 3 years by the development of editing computers. The work goes faster and easier than ever before, and the resulting edits are cleaner and more subtle. The computer process has enabled video producers to have control, equal to that of filmmakers, over their medium.

With the time-coded cassettes, the editor makes a computer edit of the final program. I discuss with the editor questions of timing, tone, and other factors. Every hour of the program will take approximately two 40-hour weeks to edit. At a rate of $100 per hour for the computer facilities, the final edit for one program may cost as much as $8000. In the final edit, an editing list is also produced by computer. This list is printed on punched tape, thus translating the entire program into computer language. It contains the time code for the entry and exit for each segment, including the start and end of such effects as lap dissolves.

With the punched tape and final edit in hand, and when an air date has been scheduled, we are ready to move to the final stages of production, when the program is polished by computer in a room affectionately dubbed "the space room." We feed the punched tape into the computer and the computer takes over, editing automatically while we sit and watch. The computer is stopped when effects or titles are added. Rental for the "space room" is $300 an hour, and it takes two 8-hour days to complete a 1-hour show. This completes the visual track of the program, but it is still necessary to refine the sound track.

Sound is stripped from the video cassette and transferred to 8-track audiotape. Many producers skip this procedure, which involves laying separate tracks and then mixing them in a high-quality sound studio, but we rely on it to add an extra dimension of quality to our work. Although we don't use much additional audio (such as music), we generally use four tracks: one each for narration, dialogue, ambient sound (background noise), and for the time code of the final edit master. All audio tracks are then mixed down to a single track by a professional sound mixer. With this track we return to the "space room" for another 2 or 3 hours and transfer the sound onto the completed final edit.

Distribution

The final stage of production is the distribution of the work. Although there is a small, natural audience for our work among documentary enthusiasts and social scientists, we are increasingly interested in achieving the large general audiences that broadcasting allows. The commercial broadcasters rarely air the work of independent documentarians, so public television is currently our principal outlet. Both Giving Birth and Home were aired nationally on PBS and did very well in terms of audiences and critical response. With Home, we entered the Public Broadcasting System through the TV lab at WNFT, which paid us for the local air rights. PBS did not acquire the rights, claiming they did not have funds for the program, so it was given to the stations free of charge.

This experience of not being paid for the work is at the heart of the dilemma faced by the producer who is really interested in ideas rather than entertainment. The commercial sector and the corporate funders of PBS are not interested in intellectually or politically motivated programming unless it shadows their own beliefs. With the current backlash against government support for the arts and humanities, programs about ideas and experimentation with forms that convey ideas will have greater and greater difficulty coming to life. As a result, the progress we and other producers like us have made in sensitizing audiences to programs with life and substance may be lost. Our plan now is to retrench and persevere, working on one program at a time and hoping that we can continue to refine and develop our method of working and to cultivate an audience that can appreciate it.